Eaton, W.C., Cmdr. 1907

[Brooklyn, NY]

SUBJECT:

Oct 17 1907

ADDRESS REPLY TO
INSPECTOR OF ENGINEERING MATERIAL, U. S. NAVY
AND REFER TO

No. .....

OFFICE OF THE NAVAL INSPECTOR OF ENGINEERING MATERIAL,
POST OFFICE BUILDING,
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

TELEPHONE, 4058 MAIN.

October 17th, 1907.

Dear sir:

Yours received and from it I judge that I owe $1.oo till next August. As August is in the middle of the year and it would appear from our correspondence that December is a better time for the expiration. I will enclose you a money order for $1.5o. That will fix it till December 1908, will it not ?

As for receiving the back numbers of the Numismatist, I received not only the back numbers for 1906, but for several years previous, but it was because I ordered and paid for them.

Regarding what you say about collecting. The collection I am making is in the name of my boy, thoggh I do most of the buying. We specialize only in the U.S. Coppers which can be procured at moderate prices and for a boy collecting only two years the collection is a pretty good one, containing nearly everything that could be procured at say $5.oo or under, e.g. he has about 150 varieties of Conn. cents; this just to show how we go into things. Of foreign we only endeavor to get one copper of each country, state or city issuing, though the boy has branched out somewhat in some of them. Funds not being plenty, however, we have to watch for chances to buy reasonably.

My own specialty when collecting was Chinese, with a side line of JAPAN, Annam and Corea, but I do nothing with it now and the collection is for sale when I can find some museum or monied collector who can buy it. My collection of Chinese was made during my three years in China and I believe is the finest in America, containing about 1500 specimens, over two hundred of which are the rare spades, pu, knife &c. with specimens of nearly every Emperor down to the present; all catalogued with reigns, inscriptions, translations, &c. making it most desirable.

The trouble is the coins are entirely too rare to make it a properly valued asset, for American collectors know so little about Chinese that they have no knowledge of the value of the varieties, to them a spade being a spade and a cash a cash merely. From obervation in China I estimated my collection worth about $4500. there, but would not hope to get more than half that here, and that only from some public institution, in the hope of finding which I am holding it.

Should you ever visit Brooklyn I would be delighted to show it to you as I think if you are a specialist in that line it would inter-

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est you. I do not mean of course as a purchaser, but simply as a collector and I would take great pleasure in showing it to you, as I would to any of the few existing collectors who could appreciate it.

Very cordially,

W. C. Eaton

Commander, U.S.Navy.

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TELEPHONE, 4058 MAIN.

October 25th, 1907.

My dear Mr. Wood:

Your letter of the 23rd received, together with the copy of the Journal of Numismatists so kindly sent. Thank you very much. Your article is very interesting being on a class of coins new to me, as my collection was ended in 1894, except for the addition of some of the new ten cash pieces.

While I have some of the Chinese coin books which I found very convenient in locating cash, by far the best work is Lacouperie.

Noting what you say about the counterfeits extant, my own trouble experienced while collecting in China was not so much in being deceived by counterfeits and taking them for genuine as the reverse, i.e. the danger of believing genuine coins to be counterfeits. During the first ~~four~~ few months of my collecting I rejected numbers of the old odd shaped cash as counterfeits I later concluded to be absolutely genuine. The reason for this state of things is the idiotic position of most Chinese collectors that an old piece must be covered with verdigrise or much corroded. A fine, practically uncirculated old knife or pu cash which to us would be a gem to them will not do at all. Therefore, they are constantly taking ~~from~~ fine specimens of genuine cash and either putting them in acid till they assume the green color or what is ~~more~~ worse, painting them, usually with a sort of green paint mixed in places with splotches of red. One glance at most of them is quite enough to have even a tyro see at once that this corrosion or the paint is modern and, therefore, the natural conclusion is that the cash itsels is fraudulent, whereas, as a matter of fact it may be perfectly good. The only way to tell these painted coins is to get off the paint and then judge the best one can. The Chinese expert has a way of telling, but it is a pretty stiff job for the American to see through the paint. While I have several of these odd shaped cash in my collection which are really counterfeits, and so marked, I have also a few with modern paint or corrosion which I have not the slightest doubt are genuine. I have also some knife cash, practically uncirculated which are unquestionably genuine, I knowing just where they were found and at the time of the find, and which are gems, but at the same time, the ordinary chinese collector

my clerk has made pretty bad work of the letter

would at once proceed to spoil them by putting them in acid.

China undoubtedly produces many counterfeit cash of the old shapes, but at the same time they are not nearly so dangerous as commonly supposed. As cunning as the Chinaman is in imitation of most things, I found that he was not nearly so successful as imagined in counterfeiting old cash, and that in general the old cash that really appeared genuine were genuine.

During my three years in China hardly a day passed that I was not hunting old cash in out of the way places and I really believe that when I left China, no man, at least any American, could be my superior as an expert on these coins. Now after so many years I do not pretend to be an expert at all as one loses this sort of sixth sense from lack of practice and now if one doubts the genuineness of a coin in my collection I can only say, "I can't tell now, but if I thought it good then, I am sure it is good".

In addition to whatever knowledge I acquired myself by constant studying, I made a habit of taking nearly all my coins to well known chinese experts and a verdict "cash good - paint or corrosion new" was not at all uncommon, in general agreeing with my own conclusion.

This fool idea of adding the corrosion effect to give a cash a supposedly old look, though in fact giving it a new look, vastly complicates the collecting of these cash, but if one goes simply by the evidently modern addition he will lose many a fine specimen, undoubtedly genuine.

The really counterfeit cash one finds in China are generally so poor that they can be told at a glance though they do have a few very good imitations, though not nearly so common as might be believed. I have some in my collection that are very good and I have labelled them "probably counterfeit on account of the company they were found in" or the circumstances under which they were procured. During my first six months in China, when I bought very little, but studied much, I thought the great mass of the old coins I found were counterfeit (by great mass I do not mean to be taken literally, for there is no great mass of any sort, these odd shapes being very scarce, either good or counterfeit) but I mean I thought the greater number were counterfeit.

Later I concluded that the greater number of those found were genuine. In addition to the conclusion from study and comparison with experts, one point has to my mind considerable weight. Should a mold be made for a particular counterfeit it is hardly to be supposed that it would not be duplicated, i.e. it is hardly supposable that the counterfeiter who makes a number of counterfeits of a certain knife, say, should make a different mold for every one he makes, i.e. the same general type and inscription, but varying just a trifle in the shape of the letters. Yet except in the case of undoubted counterfeits, I haver saw an exact duplicate. One can go into a Chinese shop and find say a dozen knife cash of a particular pattern, inscriptions all the same and, finding them all painted in exactly the same way, conclude that they are all frauds and by the same man, yet on careful examination he will see that no two of them are made from the same mold and in taking these to an expert will get the old verdict "cash good - paint new" In other words the idiotic dealer or finder has had a good thing and spoiled it by painting the lot, be-

cause they were in too good condition.

As I spent three years in which I visited all the shops in every city I visited, including many cities from Peking to Fouchow, Amoy and Hong Kong and a thousand miles up the Yangtsi River, going over and over again to the same shops, frequently at short intervals, other times at long intervals, I should certainly sooner or later have found duplicates of this class of cash (I decided to be genuine, but which an ordinary collector would have thought counterfeit) ~~good things~~ had these really ~~being~~ been counterfeits, but in all my studying there I never found an exact duplicate of any cash I had decided to be genuine. I do not mean of course in type, but in the formation of the characters.

But I am writing too long on account of my interest in this subject, as I do not often find another man with like interest. I simply wanted to emphasize the fact which I have surely by an experience which few men have had concluded to be a fact, that there is as much if not more danger of concluding a genuine chinese old cash to be counterfeit than of mistaking a counterfeit for a genuine. The real counterfeits in general are plainly so to an expert, though there are some notable exceptions. Lukily most in my collection are plainly genuine, as I avoided as much as possible those with modern tinkering, though in some cases I was obliged to take them or go without any, but not without making sure they were O.K. or when any doubt existed so marking them.

So don't conclude every "emerald green" cash as bad. It may be O.K. and if the modern corrosion is the only thing against it, it likely is good.

Very cordially,

W C Eaton

Commander, U.S.Navy.

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TELEPHONE, 4058 MAIN.

November 13th, 1907.

My dear Mr.Wood :

Your letter received yesterday as also the box of cash. I am very glad to give you my opinion regarding them, though in doing so I must again invite your attention to the fact that I no longer pose as an expert. When I left China after three years constant study of these things I believe no man in America was my superior in this line, but that was ten years ago and one loses this "sixth sense" when long in disuse. In fact one can not carry it from coins of one place to coins of another, to which I will allude later on.

Still I am glad to tell you what I think as in general I have not much doubt in the matter. However because I "say so" it does not at all follow that others, so called experts, will agree with me. For instance, I have a coin in my own collection which Proskey, who is probably the greatest all round expert in the U.S. declares positively as bad, which I believe to be good. I take his opinion without question on coins in general, but in this case think I know more about this than he does, or that at least I did ten years ago. But to take up yours in detail which I have gone over carefully three or four times.

Lot 1 - I believe these are all good.
Lot 2 - All good.
Lot 3 - All good.
Lot 4 - Not chinese; will refer to it later.
Lot 5 - These you evidently think to be fakes, but I am not at all sure that they are. The uncleaned pieces
Temple Knife pcs have the same appearances that many do that are genuine. The larger cleaned piece is the most doubtful of the lot.
Lot 6 - Both fakes in my opinion, but I congratulate you on your "doctoring" as you do it better than the aver-
fork pcs age Chinaman. By the by, the only cash in my own collection like the larger one, and of that size, is a fake also and I put it in as such.
Lot 7 - O.K.
Lot 8 - No question here as to one being genuine and the others fakes.
Lot 9 - I would call this a modern imitation of a coin in itself spurious (See Lacouperies No.102)
Lot 10- The big knife you call a fake I believe to be

genuine. At the most I do not believe it to be a modern counterfeit. The blacksmall knife, genuine. The other a better imitation than is usually made, as the old ones often have that particular look. but for the cleaned part I should be in doubt, and even at that am not sure, as very old copper can sometimes be made to show like this. But my main reason for thinking it may be genuine, despite the looks of the cleaned part, is that if this be a counterfeit it is the only one I ever saw of this kind of cash. These razor cash, though with no end of different characters on the reverse, are by far the commonest of the old shapes, and except for the purpose of getting rare inscriptions there would be little reason to counterfeit them, therefore I have never known them to be selected by the counterfeiters. In this case the characters are illegible and therefore this could not have been counterfeited on that account. I am inclined to believe it good despite the appearance of the cleaned part.

Lot 11 - I certainly call good even if bought as a fake.

Lot 12 - The two cleaned ones are O.K. the others doubtfull, but not surely a fake.

Lot 13 - Doubt if either are fakes.

Lot 14 - Small one identical with Lacouperies No.133 (page 313) Which he says is doubtful. If this is a fake I do not think it is a modern one, but an old one. The other might be good, but cannot tell on account of the paint which is certainly modern.

Key pieces

Lot 15 - O.K.

Lot 16 - O.K. Do not know about the "ancient" one being a counterfeit as I think it is ancient all right.

Lot 17 - Doubtless as you describe?

In general when a Chinese cash is so much in doubt that you think you have to give it up and cannot tell, then my experience is, that all the chances are that it is good.

During my later months in China I do not remember seeing but one lot that I had doubts about and that was in a new shop opened in Shanghai. The pieces were well adapted to deceive and principally decided by me to be fakes because he had too many, as his collection covered about every rare piece ever made and all were just alike as to surface and color. In fact I would not swear they were counterfeits, but for the profusion. These were not painted, but, if counterfeits, had been placed in vinegar or other acid to give them a green appearance. I dared buy only one as a sample of an extremely rare cash and placed it in my collection as a counterfeit. I would also beware of any Chinese shop showing a large and varied lot, especially if they all looked alike as to surface. To be sure if all were found at the same time and place they might look alike, but finds of various shapes of different periods together are not made. In fact there are no such lots. With the exception noted,

I never saw in all China a very large or varied lot in any one place They are few and far between- a half dozen here and one or two there I might except the razor cash, sometimes there are rather large finds of those, but often so corroded together that few are good specimens, and in general they all vary more or less in the characters. These odd shaped cash are mighty scarce, even in China, and worth more than they cost here, that is if one collects varieties. If one simply wants a knife cash as a sample, a couple of dollars may do for a poor razor cash, but if he wishes varieties it is another matter as he seldom will find two alikw. When it comes to spades and things of that sort they ask from $25.oo to $40.oo each in Peking, the only place I did not buy as I could not afford those figures. Aside from Peking I think I bought every odd shaped cash, unless it be a few razors, I ever saw (that were genuine) and I had mighty few duplicates. In fact I do not remember any duplicates except of some of the razor cash and the later knife and pin (7-21 A.D.) not so rare as the older ones.

And now a word to the Egyptian and Roman pieces sent for comparison. As a matter of fact I don't think one can compare. A chinese cash is only comparable with a chinese cash, as Greek or Roman are really only comparable with Greek or Roman from the same country. To illustrate. When in Asia Minor I made a very fine collection of Greek and Roman, especially Greek (which I later sold) I bought no coins at all till I had made a study of them for some weeks. Yet after some weeks I became known as an authority there as I never was fooled on an ancient coin even in that home of the counterfeiters.

The Director of the Imperial Ottoman Bank of Smyrna was an Agent of the British Museum and known as the greatest expert in Asia Minor and I used to consult him on all coins I bought. One day one of our officers took coins to him for examination as he had been in the habit of doing, when he (the expert) said, "Why do you bring these coins to me. You have an officer on board your ship whose opinion on an ancient coin of Asia Minor I will guarantee without seeing the coin, as he has never yet been deceived."

I was very proud of this, for Smyrna, as you may know, has more expert counterfeiters to the square mile than probably any other city in the universe. I could not tell why I told or how I told, I simply acquired that sixth sense. Yet, and it is for this, I cite the above, when I got to Italy I was all at sea. I could not tell a good counterfeit from a genuine to save my life. Perhaps with a Becker counterfeit this would be pardonable, but I would trust myself with hardly anything.

There was simply something different in the soil, or something of the kind, in Italy from that in Asia Minor that changed the indefinite something by which I told. I do not mean that I was stuck, because I was stuck on only one coin (and that a Becker Counterfeit which Scott here said was good, but Proskey spotted) and even that I bought with the idea it was doubtful. But I mean I hardly dared buy at all and let bargain after bargain go, because I had no confidence in myself. I lost a magnificent lot of Roman coins in this way at Athens. There was a find of a jar in which the top ones were badly ~~all~~ corroded ~~away~~, lower down came those with a beautiful patina

(never to be imitated) but lower still, where the air did not reach them at all was a lot as perfect, and even bright, as if they had just come from the mint, absolutely uncirculated first bronzes with every hair showing as distinctly as when minted, and at 5¢ each. This last part were the ones I saw, and I pooh-poohed the whole business and bought but one as a sample, but later I found out all about the find and just the circumstances, but at a time I could not get ashore again. This bears on what you say about the "tooth of time" getting in its work. It generally does, but not always. In rare cases pieces a thousand or two years are so buried that not the least air ever gets to them. The oxygen absorbed from the pot or recepticle is not enough to eat them and once gone no more reaches them. This is of course very seldom the case, but it sometimes obtains.
I have myself Chinese sword cash as good as when they were made which I know all about as perfectly genuine.

Now twenty five years have gone since I was in Asia Minor and I would'nt for a second think now of giving my opinion on a Greek or Roman coin. It simply goes to show that one may be an expert at one time or place and be all at sea at another.

As I could not judge a Greek or Roman coin in Italy after being an expert in Asia Minor, a few days before, I really would not judge a Chinese coin from the appearance of a Greek though I know many claim tox be able to do this. The ingredients of the soils and their particular action, the ingredients of the metal itself and all sorts of things come in, and this is where a collector in America who can not be on the spot is seriously hanicapped.

You have no specimens among those you send of the worst looking paint often put on genuine pieces. It is a thick regular green paint, mixed with ridiculous splotches of red. Has no resemblance to anything antique and yet is often on genuine coins. Your larger cash in envelope 14 comes the nearest to it.

In one way I am handicapped, as Canton, where I understand many counterfeits are made is one of the places I never visited, though I have been as near it as Hong-Kong. Hence I never had a chance to study the coins there. Maybe they are better counterfeiters than in other parts of China. The appearance of the corrosion on the genuine being so different in different localities in China in itself makes judgment difficult, sometimes green, sometimes blue, sometimes smooth sometimes rough &c.

But I am writing too much. I return your cash by express at your expense as directed. Adams 4p.

Very cordially,

W C Eaton

Commander, U.S.Navy.